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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

NEW LIGHT ON ENGLISH HISTORY.

THE recent publication of the Kenyon Manuscripts serves to recall the fact that the Historical Manuscripts Commission has now been at work for twenty-five years. Between forty and fifty volumes have been issued. More are to come, and when the great work undertaken at the expense of the English Government is completed, it will form what may not inaptly be described as a history of England in the rough.

There is hardly a family of any standing in England possessing even a handful of deeds and papers, which has not opened its chests and its muniment rooms to the Commission. Some great families have not only done this, but have permitted the representatives of the Commission to ransack their homes from cellar to garret in search of papers, believed by historical experts to be in their possession, but not found in the usual places of custody for such documents. The old municipal corporations have acted in the same spirit. Scores of these old boroughs have dropped out of sight since the Reform Act of 1832 took away their political importance by depriving them of their representatives in the House of Commons. But all of them have their places in English history, and the overhauling of their archives will enable historians to estimate the importance of each in national life and development.

A large number of the manuscripts go back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As a whole, they become of increasing fullness and of more vivid interest as they deal with the centuries nearer our own time. No phase of English life is untouched. It is difficult to say which are of more interest and value to historical students, the manuscripts which have been contained in the muniment rooms of the great governing families, and of the House of Lords; or the records of the old municipal corporations. Both classes are rich almost beyond description in material illustrating imperial as well as national development.

The papers from the great families throw most light on national and imperial affairs, on the beginnings and developments of England as a colonial power, and also on religious, judicial, educational and social concerns at home. On the other hand, the thousands of documents from the archives of the old corporations, while valuable in corroborating the other manuscripts on some of the points named, throw most light on the development of municipal institutions and industrial life. They enable one to measure with some accuracy, from first hand sources, the extent to which mediæval municipal institutions were developed. In going over these corporation records one is most impressed with the fact that there is little new in the more recent de-

velopments of municipal activity. In the sixteenth century some of the municipalities owned the public water supplies, others in their corporate capacity bought provisions and fuel for the people within their municipal limits; and many of the old municipalities possessed institutions which would nowadays be regarded as socialistic. In those early days, also, there was as much care for the purity of the rivers, for the cleanliness of the streets, for correct weights and measures, and for good order, as there is at the present time in the most progressive of the English municipalities.

Many of the problems with which the mediæval corporations were perplexed are still confronting the English people, only nowadays these problems are dealt with by Parliament, and not by the municipalities. In the periods covered by these old records, each municipality was largely self-contained. Its common council, meeting at the guildhall and guarding its privileges with the greatest care, passed what local laws it pleased, and there was no overriding them, unless they happened to conflict with the general law. Prominent among the open questions of to-day which were open questions three centuries ago, are those of regulating the sale of intoxicating drink and of taking care of the poor. These it would seem from the old manuscripts unearthed by the Commission have long been open questions.

Another such question is the payment of Members of the House of Commons. In the seventeenth century that question was settled by the gradual establishment of the present system under which Members of Parliament served without pay. For two or three generations there was no fixed rule. Some of the old corporations paid their members daily wages. Others in the early years of the seventeenth century demanded from their representatives undertakings to serve for nothing; and all through this transitional stage preference was given to the candidates who would serve without pay. It was the lawyers who first broke through the system of taking daily wages from the boroughs. Some of the lawyers were so eager for membership in the House that in addition to serving for nothing they undertook to discharge the legal business of the municipality on the same easy terms.

The manuscripts make it plain that some corrections will have to be made even in standard constitutional histories. One or two such alterations will have to be made in Hallam. He fixes the middle of the eighteenth century as the time when Parliamentary boroughs were first for sale. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters show that the sale of boroughs was not uncommon in the opening years of that century, and the papers published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission corroborate Lady Mary's statement, if they do not actually afford material for placing the date much earlier. There were many boroughs which were admittedly decayed in Queen Elizabeth's time. As early as 1579, the Government announced that it shortly intended to carry a measure for the reform of the existing system of parliamentary representation and to sweep many of these boroughs away. Nothing, however, was accomplished. The boroughs grew worse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in the middle years of the eighteenth century, and no reform was brought about until 1832.

For students of the period of the settlement of America and of that of the War of the Revolution, the manuscripts are full of first-hand matter, most of which is new. The Abergavenny MSS., and other papers covering the same period, taken in conjunction with Donne's Letters of North and the Walpole Correspondence, furnish full and excellent materials for a

study of the England against which America revolted, and of the methods which George III. used in the management of the House of Commons.

These papers are perhaps of special importance at this juncture in United States history. They show that the systems of political corruption and political management, "bossism" in politics, to use current political slang, was not invented in this country. George III. was as keen and as active a political boss as any American politician. He had henchmen at his side like the notorious John Robinson; interested financiers, who for a consideration, political and pecuniary, loaned him money to corrupt and buy the constituencies. Offices, great and small, were given solely as rewards for political services; men were broken and turned out of the army and the civil service solely on account of their votes in and out of Parliament. A subsidized daily press upheld the policy of the king, and maligned the characters of men who dared oppose him.

The Dundas letters in the Portland Collection will interest students of the period of the Revolution by reason of the light they throw upon some of the indirect inconveniences and losses resulting to England from the successful revolt of the American Colonies. Before the war, English convicts were sent in large numbers to this country. After the Revolution, the King and the Government were at their wits' end what to do with them. The hulks had been tried during the war, but that plan had failed. At first it was proposed the convicts should be sent to Scotland to dig canals. But Dundas, who for more than thirty years was the supreme political manager of Scotland in the Albany or New York sense of the word, was altogether opposed to a scheme of this kind, and finally it was decided to send the convicts to Botany Bay. Some of the convicts refused to go. They preferred the journey in the cart from Newgate to Tyburn, to a journey to a country so remote and unknown; and King George's patience was severely tried for an entire week by three men sentenced to be hanged, who refused pardons conditional upon their transportation to the Southern Hemisphere.

The romance attending many of the discoveries of the Historical Manuscripts Commission adds to the interest of the long series of publications. Prior to the establishment of the State Paper Office in 1578, now known as the Record Office, Secretaries of State and other high officials on going out of office carried their papers with them. Many of these have been re-collected by the Commission. Some of the most remarkable and valuable finds have been made in the most out of the way places. The great bulk of the Rutland papers was discovered in a loft over a stable at Belvoir, after a disappointing search in the mansion. Other equally valuable historical treasures have been found in dove cotes, and among the beams and rafters of baronial halls, and of the guildhalls of the old municipalities.

EDWARD PORRITT.

INDUSTRIAL FUTURE OF THE SOUTH.

Soon after the close of the Civil War one of the Southern leaders said to ex-Governor Seymour, of New York: "The North would never have beaten us if it had not been for our rivers. They ran from the North into the heart of our country; and we could not get away from you."

The converse of this is also true. The rivers of the South are an advantage in time of peace. They give access to all parts, except the mountains,